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## Ottawa hails Biden's climate approach; Environment minister expects new president to look north for inspiration

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### **Body**

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The United States is far behind Canada on **climate action** after four years with Donald Trump, says federal Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, who expects President Joe Biden will look north for inspiration as the world's second-largest emitter joins "a great acceleration" in the global push to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

In an interview with the Star on Monday, Wilkinson welcomed Biden's recent flurry of orders to make climate change a top U.S. priority. But he added that the new administration still needs to flesh out how it intends to slash emissions, even as he welcomes the prospect that more aggressive **climate action** from Washington will spur Canada's federal government to make sure it keeps pace. "Clearly, the United States has a long way to go to catch up to Canada. They've kind of been absent from this conversation for five years," he said, referring to Trump's tenure in the White House.

"They've certainly indicated climate is going to be a big focus, but they haven't been particularly detailed in terms of the policies that they plan to implement," Wilkinson added.

"We look forward to engaging that conversation and having perhaps the Americans push us in some areas to do more - and that's all for the good. It is very healthy in North America to actually have two governments that are committed to **climate action**, each trying to figure out the most effective and efficient ways to do it."

On that score, Wilkinson said he believes the Biden administration is already "very interested" in some of Canada's climate policies. He noted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has already spoken with John Kerry, the former U.S. Secretary of State appointed as Biden's climate envoy, and that Canada's ambassador in Washington spoke last week with White House national climate adviser Gina McCarthy.

"There are a number of areas where they will look to us," he said, pointing to Canada's national minimum carbon price, spending on public transit and plans to increase land and water conservation and to stop burning coal for electricity by 2030.

With Biden in the White House, Wilkinson also said there is potential to work with the U.S. federal government to speed up **climate action** on both sides of the border. He pointed to fuel efficiency standards for new vehicles, which Trump watered down in 2020, as well as co-operation on "the deployment of zero-emission vehicles" and development of "world-leading" regulations to reduce emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that leaks out of oil and gas operations.

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And with China's recent commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060, as well as financial institutions shifting to cleaner investment strategies, Wilkinson said the U.S. pivot on climate comes as countries around the world try to prevent the catastrophic impacts of global warming in the coming decades.

In Canada, the Liberal government unveiled the next phase of its own climate plan in December, detailing \$15 billion in initiatives - including a steep planned increase in the national carbon price - to meet Canada's 2030 emissions goal and drive toward net-zero by 2050.

"What we're starting to see is a great acceleration in the pace (of **climate action**), and I think the Americans rejoining the conversation is only going to further that," Wilkinson said.

In his first two weeks, Biden has signed a series of presidential orders that were applauded by environmentalists in the U.S. They include: rejoining the international Paris Agreement after the U.S. pulled out under Trump; a "pause" on new oil and gas leases on U.S. federal land; directing government agencies to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies as much as possible; requiring federal agencies to buy zero-emission vehicles; and conserving at least 30 per cent of federal lands and oceans by 2030.

The flurry of orders also included the cancellation of Keystone XL, a \$10-billion pipeline project to carry Canadian oil to the U.S. that was backed by Ottawa, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

These measures were presaged on the U.S. presidential campaign trail, prompting calls from clean energy and climate advocates for the federal government to ensure it keeps pace with a U.S. that takes serious action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. One example was Biden's nod to carbon border adjustments - tariffs on goods from countries with weaker climate policies - which raised the prospect of international pressure for stronger climate measures.

On Monday, Wilkinson said he is interested in talking about this proposal with the U.S. and that Canada would prefer a "continental approach" to align the countries in this area.

He also said Canada is still pushing the Biden administration to overturn Trump's decision to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which Wilkinson opposes out of concern for the local Porcupine caribou herd that is important to Indigenous nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

The U.S. is the world's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter after China. Under Biden, it has committed to net-zero emissions before 2050, and the country's current pledge under the Paris deal is to cut emissions to about 28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025.

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